

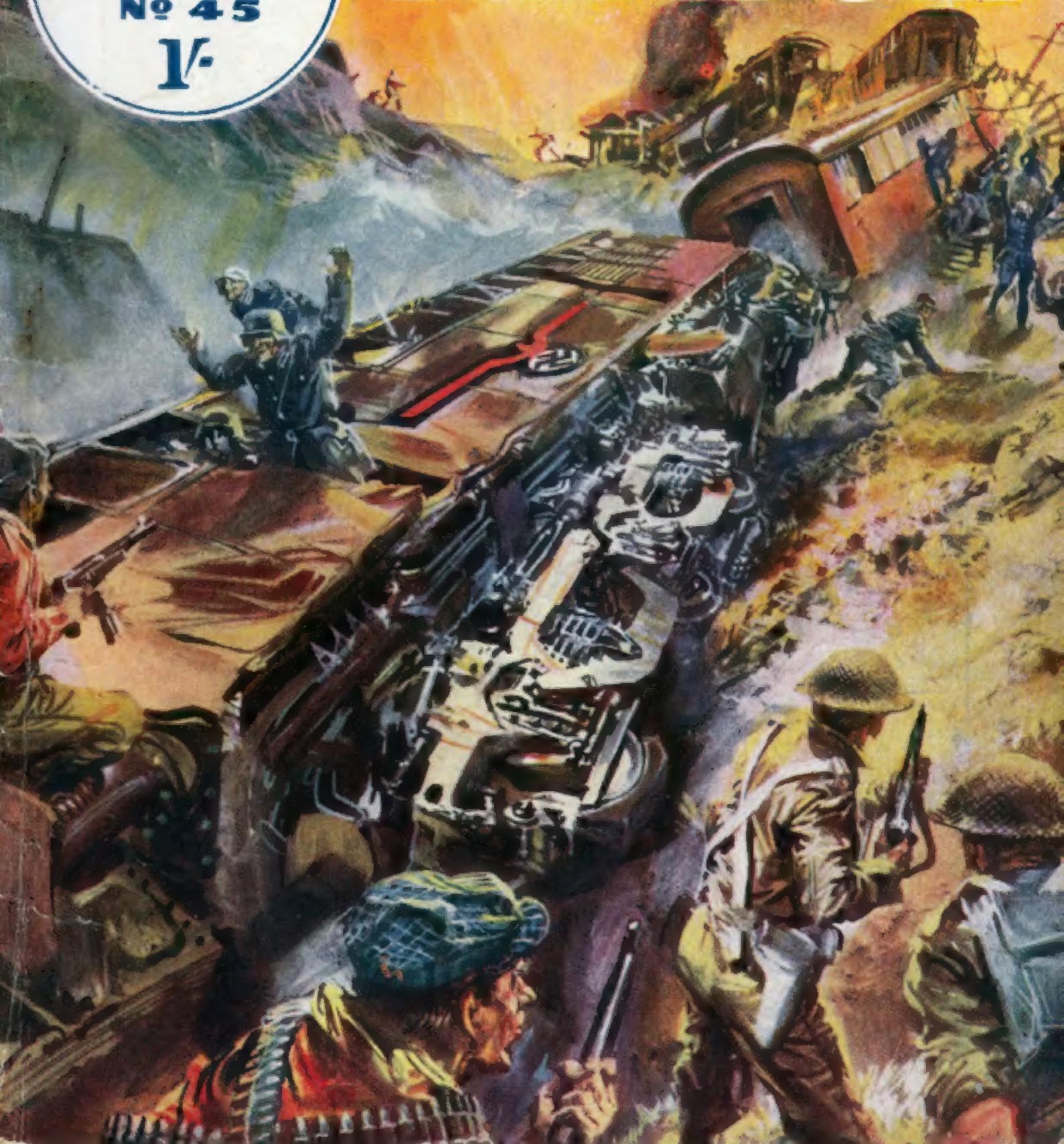
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# THE PRICE OF FREEDOM





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# ***The PRICE of FREEDOM***

TOBRUK THE STORM CENTRE! SURELY NO OTHER BATTLEGROUND IN THE BITTERLY FOUGHT WESTERN DESERT CAMPAIGN EVER SAW SUCH VIOLENT CHANGES OF FORTUNE AS RAGED AROUND THE DEFENCES OF THAT HARBOUR FORTRESS, COVETED ALIKE BY THE ALLIED 8TH ARMY AND ROMMEL'S AFRIKA KORPS.



FLUNG BACK FROM THIS PRIZE BASTION BY THE ONRUSH OF GENERAL AUCHINLECK'S ADVANCE IN 1941, FIELD-MARSHAL ROMMEL SPENT THE WINTER BUILDING UP A MASSIVE FORCE OF ARMOUR WITH WHICH HE MEANT TO AVENGE DEFEAT AND RE-TAKE TOBRUK. AND AT DAWN ON JUNE 24TH 1942, HE STRUCK.

## Chapter 1. DESERT ACTION

THE COMBINED ASSAULT BY GERMAN AND ITALIAN ARMOUR PUNCHED CRIPPLING GAPS IN THE ALLIED OUTER DEFENCES AND SURGED ON TO TOBRUK ITSELF, TO BATTER THE TOWN'S HEROIC DEFENDERS INTO DEFEAT AND SURRENDER. ONCE MORE, WAR-SCARRED TOBRUK WAS TO CHANGE HANDS.



OF THE 25,000 MIXED BRITISH AND INDIAN GARRISON REPORTED TAKEN PRISONER BY THE ENEMY, A FEW MANAGED TO SLIP THROUGH THE INRUSHING TIDE OF AXIS STEEL AND RACE EASTWARD FOR MERSA MATRUH, WHERE STURDY NEW ZEALAND TROOPS STOOD READY TO CHECK ROMMEL'S ADVANCE.



AMONG THE LAST TO MAKE THIS DASH FOR FREEDOM WAS A BRITISH SERGEANT BY THE NAME OF TOM DECKER WHO, DISREGARDING HIS OWN CHANCES OF ESCAPE, HAD STOPPED TO ROUND UP AS MANY MEN AS HE COULD GET ABOARD HIS JEEP.



POUNDING ALONG THE COAST ROAD WITH THE THANKFUL SOLDIERS CLINGING ON FOR DEAR LIFE, THE JEEP SWEEP ROUND A BEND AND MET A SIGHT WHICH MADE TOM DECKER STAMP ON THE BRAKES ...



THE ARMY LORRY, ESCAPING WITH OTHERS, HAD BEEN CAUGHT BY THE RUTHLESS PURSUIT OF CANNON-SHELLING GERMAN AIRCRAFT. A WORRIED SOLDIER APPROACHED DECKER'S JEEP...



# The Price of Freedom

IT WAS CRUEL LUCK FOR THE SOLDIERS IN DECKER'S JEEP, BUT THEY GOT OFF UNCOMPLAININGLY TO MAKE ROOM FOR THEIR WOUNDED COMRADES.



WITH HIS LOAD OF WOUNDED MEN, TOM SET OFF IN PURSUIT OF WHAT HELP HE COULD FIND. BUT IT WAS MANY MILES BEFORE HE CAUGHT UP WITH A MEDICAL UNIT...



A NEW ZEALAND ARMY CAPTAIN OVERHEARD TOM'S REMARKS AND GENEROUSLY MADE AN OFFER ...

YOU'LL NEED SOMETHING BIGGER THAN THAT PINT-SIZE BATTLE-WAGON. I'LL SWOP YOU MY TRUCK FOR THAT JEEP.



IMPRESSED BY TOM'S CALM INTENTION TO TURN BACK FOR A FEW STRAGGLERS, THE DRIVER OF THE LOANED TRUCK ASKED LEAVE TO GO WITH HIM. HIS NAME WAS PUG MEYBURGH, AND DECKER FELT GLAD OF THE COMPANY OF THIS BIG, SMILING NEW ZEALANDER. TOGETHER, THEY SET OUT ON THE HAZARDOUS ROAD BACK...

OUR MOB--THE NEW ZEALAND DIVISION--HAS BEEN SENT FROM PALESTINE TO BLOCK ROMMEL'S PUSH AT MERSA MATRUH. THE CAPTAIN AND I FIGURED WE'D NIP OUT AND MEET YOU FELLAS. SEEMS YOU'VE HAD QUITE A PASTING.

ROMMEL HAD THE TANKS, THAT'S ALL. I JUST HOPE I'M THERE WHEN WE COME BACK AT HIM!





SOME MILES FARTHER ON, AND STILL WITH NO SIGN OF THE INFANTRY STRAGGLERS, THE PAIR TOPPED A RISE AND THERE BEFORE THEM WAS AN ENEMY ADVANCE PATROL.

LOOK OUT...  
EYTTIES! SWING  
OFF THE  
ROAD!

LET'S CLOBBER  
THIS LOT!



AS THE TRUCK LURCHED TO A HALT, THE BRITISH PAIR LEAPED TO THE SAND AND OPENED FIRE WITH THEIR RIFLES. THE MOTOR OF THE ITALIANS' VEHICLE IMMEDIATELY RASPED INTO LIFE AND IT ACCELERATED AWAY...

FIRE!  
FIRE!

CARAMBA... THE  
ENGLISH! THEY  
RETURN TO THE  
ATTACK!

FASTER!  
FASTER!





FEARFUL THAT THIS MIGHT FORBODE AN ALLIED COUNTER-ATTACK, THE ITALIANS MADE OFF, LEAVING THEIR HAPLESS SERGEANT TO RACE AFTER THEM, CURSING. BUT HE HAD ONLY COVERED A FEW YARDS WHEN PUG'S NEXT BULLET PICKED HIM OFF.



CAUTIOUSLY THEY APPROACHED THE ITALIAN WHO LAY GROANING FROM A WOUND IN HIS SIDE. A SWIFT LOOK TOLD TOM THAT THE MAN WAS BADLY HIT. THIS PRESENTED A PROBLEM TO THE FAIR-MINDED TOM, BUT NOT TO THE TOUGH NEW ZEALANDER.

'WE CAN'T LEAVE HIM LIKE THIS, BUT I WANT TO PUSH ON AND SEE IF I CAN FIND MY CHAPS.'



THERE SEEMED NO ALTERNATIVE, SO THEY CARRIED THE WOUNDED ENEMY BACK TO THE TRUCK.



## The Price of Freedom

BUT THIS WAS TOTAL WAR AND, FAR FROM SHOWING HIS THANKS, THE ITALIAN TOOK SWIFT ADVANTAGE OF AN OFF-GUARD MOMENT AND DESPITE THE PAIN FROM HIS WOUND, GRABBED PUG'S RIFLE...



BUT BEFORE EITHER COULD MOVE, THE ITALIAN HAD SWUNG THE RIFLE ON TOM WHO REELED BACK WITH A SMASHED SHOULDER. PUG'S IMPETUOUS LUNGE WAS CHECKED BY A SMOKING GUN BARREL AIMED STRAIGHT BETWEEN HIS EYES. HE STOOD WEAPONLESS AND OUTRAGED WHILE TOM COLLAPSED IN PAIN.





CLEARLY IN GREAT PAIN, THE ITALIAN CLUNG TO CONSCIOUSNESS AND TO THE WHIPHAND WHICH THE RIFLE GAVE HIM. WITH IT, HE MADE THE CURSING PUG DRIVE THEM BACK TO TOBRUK AND THE GERMAN LINES. PUG KNEW THAT IF HE DID NOT DO THIS, TOM WOULD BE SHOT DEAD WHERE HE SAT.



SOON THEY CAME UPON A FORCE OF THE ITALIAN 20TH. MOTORISED CORPS, AND TOM AND PUG WERE OFFICIALLY TAKEN PRISONER. WITH COLDLY RESENTFUL EYES THEY WATCHED THE ITALIAN SERGEANT, THE AUTHOR OF THEIR UNHAPPY STATE, BORNE AWAY FOR TREATMENT.



FROM THE DEPTHS OF HIS HUMILIATION AND PAIN, TOM DECKER WAS READY TO AGREE WITH THE DISGUSTED NEW ZEALANDER. THE BITTEREST BLOW OF ALL WAS THAT HE WAS NOW OUT OF THE FIGHT. FOR HIM AND PUG THERE WAS NOTHING BUT THE SLOW, EMPTY YEARS BEHIND BARBED WIRE.

## Chapter 2. PRISONERS OF WAR

FIFTEEN WEARY MONTHS IN PRISON CAMPS IN ITALY DID NOT BREAK TOM'S WILL TO ESCAPE. THREE TIMES HE AND THE CHEERY PUG MEYBURGH ATTEMPTED IT, AND THREE TIMES FAILED. UNDAUNTED, THEY BIDED THEIR TIME, AND ALL THE WHILE, TREMENDOUS EVENTS WERE TAKING PLACE ...





SUDDENLY, THOSE EVENTS BURST UPON THE MONOTONY OF THE PRISON CAMP ...

LISTEN, EVERYBODY ...  
MUSSOLINI'S FINISHED!  
ITALY HAS  
SURRENDERED!

THE EIGHTH  
ARMY AND THE  
AMERICANS HAVE  
LANDED IN ITALY!



THE WHOLE CAMP WAS THROWN INTO THE WILDEST SPECULATIONS.

LET US OUT!  
WHAT ARE YOU  
WAITING FOR?

COME ON,  
BRUZZI ...  
HAVE A  
HEART!

YOU'RE ON  
OUR SIDE,  
NOW!



## The Price of Freedom

BUT PRIVATE BRUZZI, ONE OF THE MORE FRIENDLY GUARDS, WAS NOT TO BE DRAWN. LIKE MOST OF THE ITALIANS, HE HAD NOT THE SLIGHTEST IDEA WHAT WAS GOING TO HAPPEN.



SANTO MIO ~  
WHAT SHALL I DO?  
I TELL YOU, I WILL  
SPEAK TO THE  
COMMANDANT

NO! IT IS  
I WHO WILL  
SPEAK TO THE  
COMMANDANT.

FOLLOWED BY AN EXCITED CROWD, TOM AND PUG SOUGHT RELEASE FROM THE COMMANDANT, BUT THEY RAN UP AGAINST A BRICK WALL ...

LET YOU GO? **PREPOSTEROUS!**  
ITALY MAY HAVE SURRENDERED  
BUT SHE IS FULL OF GERMANS.  
I WOULD BE EXECUTED ON THE  
SPOT BY THE GESTAPO!  
APPEAL DISMISSED!



NEXT DAY, MORE RUMOURS WERE FLYING ABOUT AND TOM, WHO WAS EMPLOYED TO DO THE ITALIANS' CLERICAL WORK, KEPT HIS EARS OPEN.

I HEAR THE GERMANS  
ARE RETREATING ALL  
ALONG THE SOUTH.

THE BRITISH  
GENERAL WILL  
DRIVE THEM  
ALL OUT OF  
ITALY. BAD  
FOR  
GERMANS.  
GOOD FOR  
ITALIANS!



MORE LIKELY  
KESSELRING HAS  
ORDERED THE GERMANS  
NORTH TO JOIN WITH HIS  
MAIN ARMY. THEN THEY  
WILL MAKE A STAND.



BUT MORE DISTURBING WAS THE NEWS THAT PRIVATE BRUZZI HAD FOR THE BRITISH SERGEANT. IT WAS THE FRIENDLY ITALIAN'S DUTY TO ESCORT TOM ON HIS WEEKLY STOCK-TAKING WHICH INCLUDED A PETROL PUMP SECTION DOWN THE ROAD.



LATER, AND WITH GROWING CONCERN, TOM SOUGHT OUT PUG MEYBURGH.

UNLESS WE GET OUT OF THIS DUMP QUICK, WE'LL BE TAKEN OVER BY THE GERMANS, TOO. AND THAT WON'T BE FUNNY.

LET'S GO! YOU'VE ALWAYS SAID THAT. BRUZZI FELLER MIGHT HELP YOU. SEE WHAT HE SAYS.



WE'VE GOT TO THINK IT OUT FIRST. WE COULD BEAT IT SOUTH LIKE WE'VE ALWAYS PLANNED AND JOIN UP WITH THE ALLIED ARMY.

SURE! THEY CAN'T BE MORE THAN FORTY OR FIFTY MILES AWAY. LET'S FIGURE HOW WE CAN USE BRUZZI.



## The Price of Freedom

THERE WAS NO TIME FOR COMPLEX PLANNING. TOM'S IDEA WAS SIMPLY TO INDUCE BRUZZI TO TURN A BLIND EYE NEXT TIME THEY DID THE FILLING-STATION TRIP. THEN HE AND PUG, WHO WOULD BE CONCEALED IN THE VAN, WOULD DROP OFF AND MAKE A DASH FOR IT. WHEN APPROACHED, BRUZZI WAS SYMPATHETIC BUT DOUBTFUL ...



THEN TOM PLAYED HIS TRUMP CARD...



BUT AS IF SPECIALLY TIMED BY A MALICIOUS FATE, PRIVATE BRUZZI WAS SWITCHED TO OTHER DUTIES AND FOR DAYS WAS LOST TO SIGHT. MEANWHILE THE WOULD-BE ESCAPEES ENDURED AN AGONY OF IMPATIENCE AND DOUBT...







## The Price of Freedom

AS THEIR RANKS WERE DISMISSED, TOM TURNED TO PUG WITH A SUDDEN SWIFT RESOLVE.

WE'VE GOT TO GET OUT OF HERE, PUG. WHAT D'YOU SAY?

WITHOUT BRUZZI'S HELP? THESE PRUSSIAN GORILLAS WILL TEAR US TO BITS. BUT I'M WITH YOU, BOY. JUST SAY WHEN!

TO HIS RELIEF, TOM DISCOVERED THAT FOR A FEW DAYS THE ADMINISTRATION WAS STILL WITH THE ITALIANS. HE KEPT HIS CLERICAL JOB BUT IT WOULD NOT BE FOR LONG. THEIR ESCAPE MUST BE MADE AT ONCE.

WILL THEY LET ME OUT IN THE VAN TOMORROW? I WONDER WHO THEY'LL GIVE ME INSTEAD OF BRUZZI?





THE DAY'S WORK DONE, TOM CONFERRED WITH PUG, AND HIS MIND WAS MADE UP ...

EVEN WITH NO BRUZZI, WE'LL DO THE VAN TRICK. I'LL EXPLAIN TO MY ESCORT, WHOEVER HE IS, THAT YOU'RE TAKING MY JOB. I'M SHOWING YOU THE ROPES, UNDERSTAND? THEN WHEN ... OR RATHER IF ... WE GET THROUGH THE MAIN GATES AND DOWN THE ROAD ...

I GET YOU, BOY. WE CLOBBER THE ESCORT AND DROP OFF. CRUDE BUT EFFECTIVE!

BOTH SPENT A RESTLESS NIGHT. THEIRS SEEMED SUCH A WILD, HURRIED PLAN, BUT IT WAS NOW OR PROBABLY NEVER. THEY LAY REHEARSING IT IN THEIR MINDS, TRYING TO STILL THE SHIVERS OF ANTICIPATION.

IN THE MORNING, TOM MADE READY FOR HIS USUAL WEEKLY STORE-CHECK, EXPECTING ANY MINUTE TO HAVE IT CALLED OFF. MECHANICALLY HE WENT THROUGH THE MOTIONS OF HIS DUTY ALTHOUGH HIS MIND SEETHED WITH UNANSWERED QUESTIONS ...

WILL THE VAN COME, I WONDER? WILL MY ESCORT SEE THROUGH OUR LITTLE GAME? WILL THE NEW GERMAN GUARD AT THE MAIN GATES TURN US BACK?

# The Price of Freedom

THE VAN CAME AND NO ONE STOOD IN TOM'S WAY. THEN AS HE STEPPED TOWARDS THE VEHICLE WITH A BEATING HEART, HE NEARLY GAVE THE SHOW AWAY WITH AN EXCLAMATION.



TOM GLIMPSED PUG ALREADY INSIDE THE VAN AND KNEW THAT ALL THAT WAS NEEDED NOW WAS TO BAMBOOZLE THE GERMAN GUARD.

THE VAN WENT ON TO THE MAIN GATE WHERE THE TWO PRISONERS HELD THEIR BREATH WHILE BRUZZI EXPLAINED THE POSITION FAR MORE CONVINCINGLY THAN TOM COULD EVER HAVE DONE. CLEARLY PUG HAD PUT HIM UP TO IT.



TOM COULD HARDLY BELIEVE THEIR LUCK WHEN THE VAN BEGAN MOVING OFF. THE GERMANS STOOD STARING AFTER IT WITH PONDEROUS THOUGHT, FOR BRUZZI HAD GIVEN THEM NO TIME TO REACH A DECISION. THE ITALIAN SEEMED IN A GAY MOOD.



SOME MILES FARTHER ON, BRUZZI DIVULGED THE REASON FOR HIS LIGHT-HEARTED MOOD .....



TOM AND PUG STARED UNBELIEVINGLY AT THE HAPPY ITALIAN AND THEN DELIGHTEDLY AT EACH OTHER. THEIR ONE FEAR THAT BRUZZI WOULD BE PUNISHED FOR THEIR ESCAPE NOW VANISHED. THE ASTONISHING FELLOW HAD SUPPLIED HIS OWN SOLUTION.



BY AGREEMENT, THE VAN STOPPED BY A LONELY WOOD AND THE FAREWELLS WERE SHORT. BRUZZI RECEIVED THE PROMISED WATCH WITH WARM THANKS AND SWORE ETERNAL FRIENDSHIP, BUT CLEARLY HE WAS IN A HURRY TO BE GONE, AND SO WERE TOM AND PUG.



THE RUNAWAYS SWIFTLY JUDGED THEIR BEARINGS AND AGREED ON THE NEXT MOVE ....

I MAKE IT  
THAT WAY FOR  
THE COAST...  
ABOUT SIXTEEN  
MILES, SO I'M  
TOLD.

LET'S PUSH  
ON A WAY  
AND THEN  
HOLE UP  
TILL DARK.



THIS THEY DID, AND AT NIGHTFALL, WITH NO SIGN OF PURSUIT, THEY CAUTIOUSLY BEGAN THE CROSS-COUNTRY TREK.

# Chapter 3. PARTISANS

WORKING EASTWARDS ALL NIGHT, TOM AND PUG WERE REWARDED SOON AFTER DAWN BY THE SIGHT OF A SMALL PORT CLOSE BESIDE THE BLUE ADRIATIC.

GOOD! THAT MUST BE CIVITA. LOOKS FRIENDLY ENOUGH FROM HERE.

WE'LL HAVE TO TAKE A CHANCE AND FIND OUT.

THEY SLID QUIETLY INTO THE OUTSKIRTS OF THE TOWN AND CAME UPON A LITTLE URCHIN PLAYING WITH A PUPPY. THEY TRIED OUT THEIR SKETCHY ITALIAN ON HIM, HOPING THAT HE MIGHT TAKE THEM TO SOMEONE FRIENDLY TO THE ALLIED CAUSE.

WE INGLESE SOLOATI, MATE.

NOI ABBIAMO AMICO, VICINO, SI? WE HAVE FRIENDS NEAR HERE, YES?



THE URCHIN STARED, AND AFTER SOME HESITATION LED THEM INTO THE DINGY BACK STREETS.

I DON'T THINK THE NIPPER UNDERSTOOD US, AND I CAN'T SAY I'M SURPRISED!

KEEP YOUR EYES PEELED FOR SUSPICIOUS CHARACTERS... I MEAN SUSPICIOUS OF US!



CAUTIOUSLY THEY FOLLOWED THEIR SMALL GUIDE UNTIL HE STOPPED AND TRIED A DOOR...

THIS MUST BE HIS HOME. KEEP YOUR FINGERS CROSSED!



LOOKS LIKE THE DOOR'S BOLTED.

UNABLE TO OPEN THE DOOR, THE BOY GAVE IT UP AND THEN, TO THE HORROR OF THE TWO MEN, HE BEGAN SHOUTING UP AT THE WINDOW. ADDED TO THIS, THE PUPPY STARTED YAPPING.

MAMA! MAMA! YEE-WEE!

HEY! QUIET!

BY HEAVENS, I FORGOT... IT'S SUNDAY!





MISTAKING THEIR MEANING, THE URCHIN SMILED AND SHRILLED THE LOUDER. IN NO TIME FURIOUS HEADS CAME POKING OUT OF THE WINDOWS.



SOME MORE HEADS APPEARED UNTIL THE ALLEY RANG WITH ITALIAN INDIGNATION. THIS WAS TOO MUCH FOR THE NERVES OF BOTH PUG AND TOM.



THEY CLATTERED ALONG COBBLED ALLEYS AND AROUND CORNERS, ONLY TO COME FACE TO FACE WITH A PATROL OF GERMAN SOLDIERS.



SPURRED BY THE GUTTURAL SHOUTS OF THE PURSUING GERMANS, TOM AND PUG DASHED THROUGH A MAZE OF NARROW, TWISTING PASSAGES.



FEARFUL THAT EACH TURN MIGHT PROVE A DEAD-END TRAP, TOM HESITATED FOR A MOMENT -- AND SUDDENLY AN ARM REACHED OUT FROM A SHADOWY DOORWAY ...



THE DOOR SHUT QUIETLY BEHIND THEM AND THE BREATHLESS FUGITIVES FOUND THEMSELVES FACED BY A ROUND LITTLE ITALIAN WHO MOTIONED FOR SILENCE AS THE GERMANS POUNDED BY.



WHEN HE CONSIDERED THE DANGER PAST, THE LITTLE MAN QUESTIONED THEM CLOSELY...



TOM RETURNED THE ITALIAN'S SEARCHING LOOK. COULD THIS PLUMP LITTLE MAN BE AN ALLY?

SEEMINGLY SATISFIED, THEIR TIMELY RESCUER BROUGHT THEM FOOD, EXPLAINING THAT HIS FAMILY WAS STILL ABED. TOM REALISED HE WOULD HAVE TO TAKE A CHANCE AND SPOKE FRANKLY...





THEN THE ITALIAN'S FACE CREASED INTO A WRY GRIN ...



BABBINO, AS THE LITTLE ITALIAN WAS CALLED, SUMMONED A FEW OF HIS FRIENDS TO MEET THE TWO ESCAPEES IN THE CELLAR OF HIS HOUSE ...

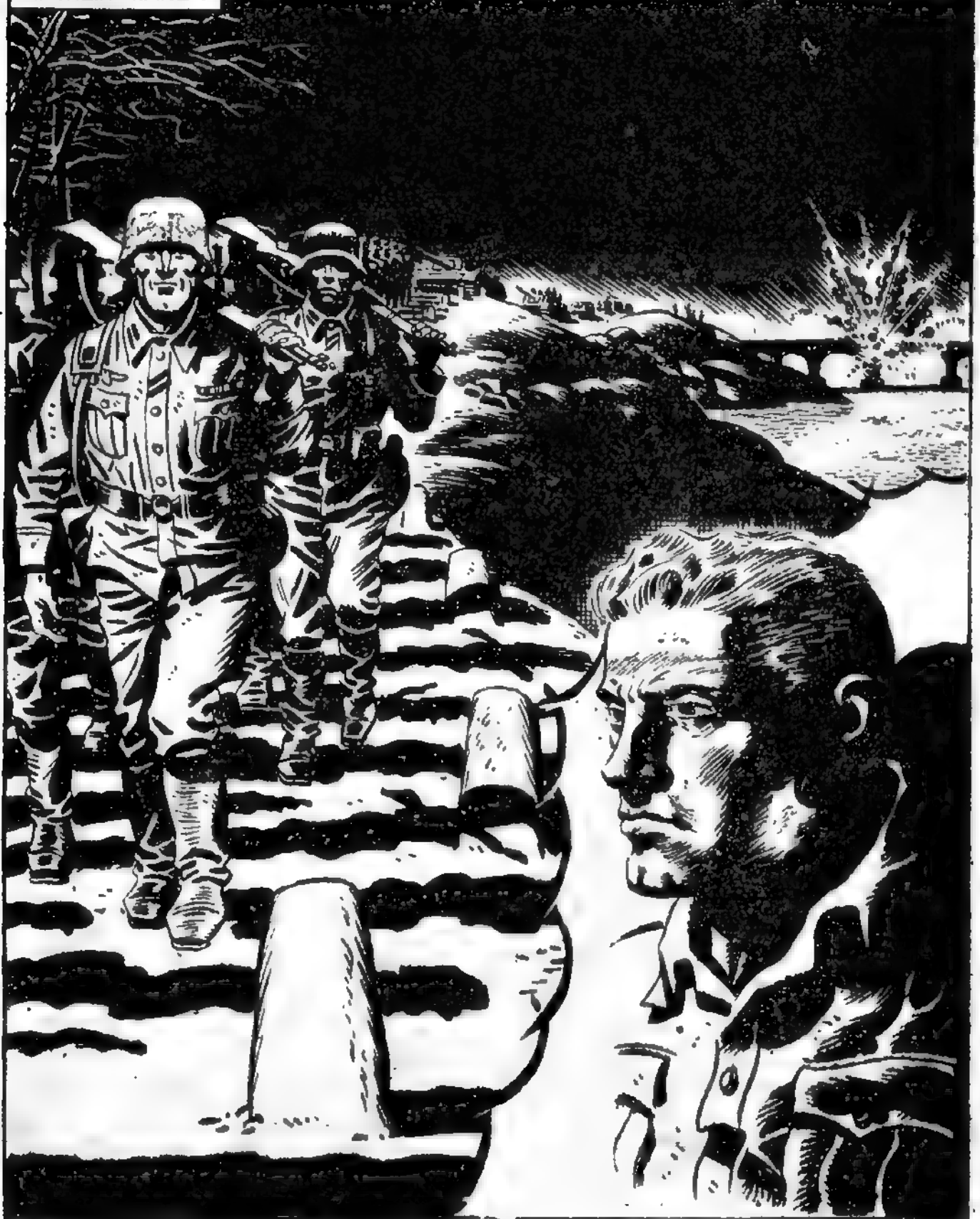
THAT MUSSOLINI -- HE STAMP' ON MY NEWSPAPER -- ON ALL NEWSPAPERS -- ON DEMOCRATIC WORKERS LIKE MY FRIENDS HERE. NOW MUSSOLINI GONE -- FASCISM GONE -- SOON GERMANS GONE -- WE HELP BRITISH.

SI, SI! WE STRIKE FOR FREEDOM!

WE STRIKE GERMANS, TOO!



FROM THE EXCITED AND FORCEFUL TALK OF THE ITALIANS, TOM WAS ABLE TO GATHER SOME IDEA OF THE STATE OF THE WAR. IT SEEMED THE 8TH ARMY WAS DRIVING UP THE ADRIATIC COAST HARD ON THE HEELS OF THE GERMANS WHO WERE LEAVING A TRAIL OF DEMOLITION AND DESTRUCTION IN THEIR WAKE.



## The Price of Freedom

SEVERAL REGIMENTS OF THESE GERMANS WERE EVEN THEN PASSING THROUGH CIVITA, AND THE GROUP AGREED WITH TOM THAT THEY MUST TRY TO IMPEDE THEIR RETREAT, ENABLING THE ALLIES TO OVERTAKE AND DESTROY THEM. IN FACT, THE ITALIANS HAD ALREADY BEEN BUSY...



WE MAKE A BIG FALL OF ROCK ON THE RAILWAY. IT LOOK VERY NATURAL, SIGNORI.

ALL SABOTAGE HAS TO LOOK NATURAL... ELSE THE GERMANS WOULD PUNISH THE TOWN.

TOM AND PUG LISTENED TO THESE SPIRITED MEN WITH RISING HOPES. SURELY THEY WOULD OFFER TO HELP THEM ON THEIR JOURNEY.

BUT NO SUCH OFFER CAME AND THE TWO ESCAPED PRISONERS RESIGNED THEMSELVES TO THE INCESSANT ITALIAN CHATTER. AT LAST BABBINO BROKE W...

THE GERMANS SOON CLEAR ROCKS, BUT--AHA! WE HAVE A BETTER PLAN TO BLOCK THE RAILWAY... EH, MY FRIENDS?



SI, SI! VERY ASTUTO!

TOM GUESSED THAT BABBINO WAS LEADING UP TO SOMETHING AND SOON IT CAME OUT. HE HAD A PROPOSITION... A BARGAIN.

BUT THIS BETTER PLAN REQUIRES AGILITY AND, ALAS, WE THE FRATELLANZA--THE BROTHERHOOD--ARE NO LONGER YOUNG. NOW, IF YOU INGLESE WILL LEND YOUR YOUNG MUSCLES, THEN OUR OLD HEADS WILL HELP YOU TO JOIN YOUR COMRADES. HOW SAY?

THAT'S OKAY!

SOUNDS FAIR ENOUGH.





THAT MUCH AGREED, THE FRATELLANZA PLUNGED INTO PLANNING AND ARGUMENT. TOM AND PUG WERE GIVEN CLOTHES AND ARMS AND THAT NIGHT THEY ALL ASSEMBLED AT A REMOTE COUNTRY SPOT.



STILL IGNORANT OF EXACTLY WHAT WAS REQUIRED OF THEM, TOM AND PUG TRUDGED BESIDE THE SILENT MEN UNTIL THEY CLIMBED TO THE RAILWAY WHERE IT CURVED BENEATH A SHEER WALL OF MOUNTAIN.



## The Price of Freedom

CASCADING STORM-WATER MADE BABBINO'S WORDS DIFFICULT TO CATCH, BUT TOM AND PUG WERE LEFT IN NO DOUBT OF WHAT WAS EXPECTED OF THEM.

ALL THIS RAIN. IT COMES DOWN THE MOUNTAIN. BUT SPECIAL CHANNELS GUIDE IT THROUGH THESE TUNNELS. UNDER THE LINE AND SO AWAY -- NO HARM TO THE RAILWAY. BUT YOU, MY FRIENDS, WILL ALTER THAT, YES?



WHEN BABBINO CHEERFULLY ADDED IT WOULD MEAN THEM CLAMBERING A LITTLE WAY UP THE MOUNTAIN WITH DYNAMITE, THE SOLDIERS PULLED WRY FACES. BUT, DANGEROUS THOUGH IT MIGHT BE, IF THIS WAS THE PRICE OF FREEDOM, THEY WERE WILLING TO PAY IT.

HERE IS THE DYNAMITE. YOU MUST INSERT IT NEAR A GULLY-- A BIG ONE, PLEASE--AND LIGHT THE FUSE. SIMPLICITA!

SIMPLICITA!  
WE'LL PROBABLY  
KILL OURSELVES  
BUT...

WE'LL  
DO IT. IF IT WORKS  
THE SURPRISE WILL  
KILL ME  
ANYWAY!



HAMPERED BY DARKNESS AND THE SPRAY, TOM AND PUG SET THEIR TEETH AND BEGAN THE ASCENT. THEY HAD AGREED ON A SPOT SOME FIFTY FEET UP, BUT EVERY DIFFICULT FOOT MADE THE REMAINDER SEEM ALMOST IMPOSSIBLE.



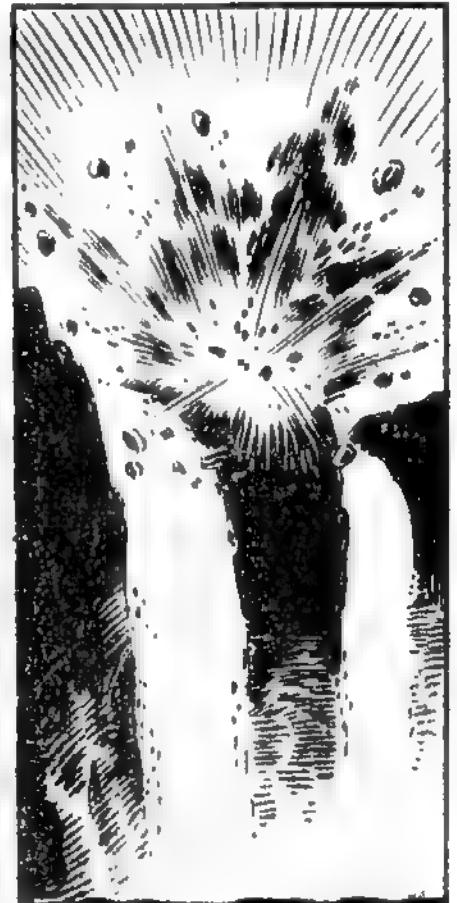
DRENCHED AND PANTING THEY REACHED THE SELECTED POINT AND THEN WEDGED IN THE STICKS OF DYNAMITE. THEY HAD TO SHOUT ABOVE THE CLAMOUR OF FALLING WATER...

IF THIS CRAZY IDEA WORKS..

I HOPE THESE DARN FUSES GIVE US TIME TO GET DOWN AGAIN!



SOON THE FUSES WERE SPLUTTERING FIERCELY, AND THE PAIR BEGAN A HASTY RETREAT.





AS PUG LEAPT THE LAST FEW FEET SEVERAL THINGS HAPPENED AT ONCE. THE TWO STREAMS HAD BEEN UNITED BY THE EXPLOSION INTO ONE GIANT WATERFALL WHICH STRUCK THE NEW ZEALANDER OFF BALANCE, DEAFENED BY THE NOISE, HE DID NOT HEAR THE APPROACH OF AN ONCOMING LOCOMOTIVE...



TOM DROPPED THE REMAINING FEET LIKE A STONE- AND  
SWEEP TUG OFF HIS FEET AWAY FROM THOSE FLYING WHEELS.



THE LOCOMOTIVE THUNDERED  
BY, INCHES ONLY FROM THE  
PROSTRATE MEN.



THE TRAIN CLATTERED ON, AND BABBINO'S MEN SPRANG TO DRAG THE TWO GASPING MEN CLEAR OF THE CASCADING WATER.



WHEN THEY HAD REGAINED THEIR BREATH, TOM AND PUG COULD SHARE THE GRINNING SATISFACTION OF THE ITALIANS AS THEY WATCHED THE GREAT COLUMN OF WATER SMASHING DOWN UPON THE PERMANENT WAY.



REMEMBERING THE ITALIAN'S PROMISE TO HELP THEM BACK TO THEIR OWN LINES IN RETURN FOR THIS EFFORT, TOM AND PUG HAD A DOUBLE REASON TO BE PLEASED.



*Chapter 4.***MOUNTAIN AMBUSH**

THE NEXT DAY, BABBINO WAS AS GOOD AS HIS WORD. THEIR JOB DONE, THE TWO FRIENDS WERE EQUIPPED FOR THEIR TREK SOUTH, AND GIVEN A MOUNTAIN GUIDE BY THE NAME OF TRUFFI.

COAST ROAD FULL OF RETREATING GERMANS. TRUFFI HERE WILL TAKE YOU OVER THE MOUNTAINS. I COME WITH YOU A FEW MILES. YOU OUR BROTHERS NOW.

HALLO, TRUFFI!



ARMED AND PROVISIONED, TOM AND PUG TOOK FAREWELL OF THE BROTHERHOOD AND BY NIGHTFALL HAD REACHED THE MOUNTAINS:



GAINING THE HIGHER SLOPES, BABBINO PAUSED TO POINT INTO THE VALLEY WHERE ARC LIGHTS LIT THE HILLSIDE. A TRAIN LAY WRECKED AND REPAIR GANGS WERE BUSY ON THE LINE WHICH HAD BEEN TORN UP BY THE DIVERTED STORM WATER.



UNDER THE GREAT TORRENT OF WATER, THE EMBANKMENT HAD SILTED AWAY, LEAVING THE RAILS SPANNING EMPTY AIR. THE NEXT GERMAN TROOP TRAIN HAD PLUNGED TO DESTRUCTION AND A SOLID LINE OF TROOP-FILLED ROLLING STOCK WAITED IMPOTENTLY WHILE THE SLOW REPAIRS WENT ON.



AT MIDNIGHT, BABBINO TOOK A WARM FAREWELL AND TURNED BACK, LEAVING THE SILENT BUT SHREWD TRUFFI TO CONTINUE AS GUIDE.



BY MORNING THE THREE HAD TOPPED THE MOUNTAIN AND THEN THEY PAUSED ON THE OTHER SIDE FOR REST AND FOOD IN THE EARLY SUNSHINE...



MEANWHILE, THE ALLIES WERE DOGGEDLY PURSUING THEIR ADVANCE NORTHWARD, CHECKED ONLY BY A VARIETY OF GERMAN TRAPS, MINES AND HASTILY IMPROVISED OBSTRUCTIONS.





SNATCHING A SHORT SLEEP, THE THREE TRAVELLERS CHECKED THEIR GUNS AND BEGAN THE DESCENT. THE SUN HAD NOW GIVEN WAY TO RAIN CLOUDS THROUGH WHICH ONLY FITFUL GLIMPSES COULD BE HAD OF THEIR DOWNWARD ROUTE.

THIS MIST OUR GOOD FRIEND. NO ONE SEE US!

YOU'RE A GOOD SCOUT, TRUFFI!



ALL MORNING THEY WORKED DOWNWARD BY EASY STAGES. THEN THE ROAR OF POWERFUL ENGINES BEGAN TO REVERBERATE AROUND THE VALLEY AND THE THREE MEN HALTED CAUTIOUSLY, CLIMBING THE ROAD THAT SNAKED UP THE LOWER SLOPES CAME A GERMAN MOTORISED REGIMENT.

LOOK, GERMANS!

SO SOON!

THE MAIN ROAD MUST BE CHOCK-A-BLOCK, ELSE THEY WOULDN'T TACKLE THIS TRICKY ROUTE.



QUITE UNCONCERNED, TRUFFI BRANCHED OFF DOWN A FRESH TRACK WHICH TOOK THEM REPEATEDLY ACROSS THE ZIGZAGGING ROAD. THIS WAS ALIVE WITH TRUCKS AND IT WAS A CASE OF SPLIT-SECOND TIMING TO AVOID BEING SPOTTED BY THE ENEMY.

NOW!





## The Price of Freedom

THE SAME IDEA FLASHED BEFORE TOM AND PUG SIMULTANEOUSLY....

WE'VE GOT TO NOBBLE THIS LITTLE GAME, BOY!

WE'LL HAVE TO CIRCLE WIDE AND GET WORD TO OUR CHAPS. WHAT D'YOU SAY, TRUFFI?

HOW FAR THE BRITISH? TWO MILES... TWENTY MILES... WHO KNOWS? WE CAN TRY!



THE TIRELESS TRUFFI LED THEM ON A ROUNDABOUT COURSE WHICH, MADE SLIPPERY BY TEEMING RAIN, TAXED EVEN THEIR STOUT MUSCLES. BY LATE AFTERNOON, WET AND CLAMMY, THEY ARRIVED AT A LOWER SLOPE WHICH LED FINALLY TO A RIVER.

DO WE CROSS THIS RIVER, TRUFFI?

WE FIND A BOAT, MEBBE.



I'VE A HUNCH WE'VE WORKED TOO FAR EAST TO HIT OUR MAIN COLUMN.

THEY HAD JUST WORKED DOWN THROUGH A BELT OF TREES WHEN A WARNING FROM TRUFFI SENT THEM DIVING FOR COVER. BETWEEN THEM AND THE RIVER CROUCHED SOME THIRTY GERMANS!



DOWN!



TOM, PUG AND TRUFFI WAITED, WATCHING, UNTIL SUDDENLY BRITISH AND ITALIAN TROOPS APPEARED ON THE FAR BANK. GERMAN MACHINE-GUNS AND RIFLES WERE THRUST FORWARD MENACINGLY, THEIR MUZZLES TRAINED ON THE UNSUSPECTING ALLIES ...

SEE... ITALIAN SOLDIERS MAKE FRIENDS WITH YOUR ARMIES. THEY FIGHT TOGETHER AGAINST THE GERMANS!

THEY'RE GOING TO COME OVER ON RAFTS

WE'VE GOT TO WARN THEM, OR JERRY WILL MOW THEM DOWN!



THE FIRST RAFTS WERE LAUNCHED... AND THE GERMANS STIFFENED, WAITING FOR THE ORDER TO FIRE...

QUICK... GIVE THEM COVERING FIRE!



## The Price of Freedom

AS TOM'S FIRST SHOT RANG OUT, THE SOLDIERS IN THE RAFTS STOPPED PADDLING. EQUALLY SURPRISED, THE GERMANS JERKED INTO VIEW AND FOR A SECOND THE BATTLE POISED ...



TO TOM'S AMAZEMENT, THE FORDING PARTY, FAR FROM BEING DETERRED, PADDLED FURIOUSLY TOWARDS THE ENEMY BANK, FIRING AS THEY WENT. SUCH WAS THE FIGHTING SPIRIT OF THE ALLIES THAT THEY WERE NOT TO BE EASILY TURNED ASIDE.



TOM, PUG AND TRUFFI KEPT UP A RAPID COVERING FIRE, DARTING ABOUT THE ROCK-STREWN SLOPE TO MAKE THE GERMANS THINK THEY WERE A LARGER FORCE...

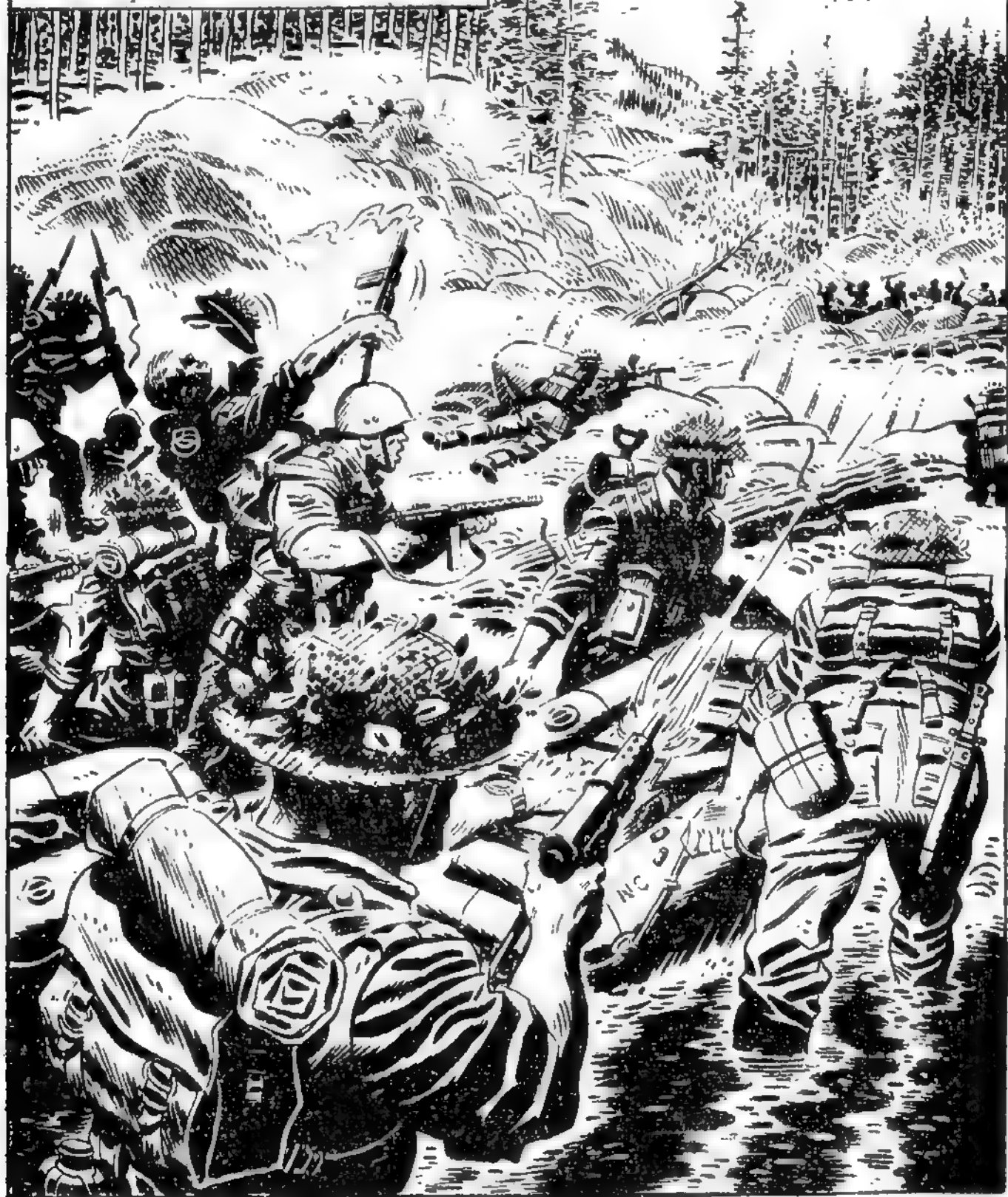


FIRED ON FROM FRONT AND REAR, THE GERMANS PANICKED. THE OFFICER RE-POSITIONED HIS MEN, AND THE FIRST FORDING PARTY BEACHED THEIR RAFTS ALMOST WITHOUT OPPOSITION.

ACHTUNG! TURN THAT MACHINE-GUN ON THE RAFTS, YOU OTHERS FIRE ON THE ENEMY IN THE REAR!



A FIERCE FIGHT FOR A BEACH-HEAD NOW TOOK PLACE. GAINING COVER, THE FORWARD ATTACKING TROOPS KEPT UP AN AGGRESSIVE FIRE WHILE THEIR COMRADES BEACHED AND RUSHED TO JOIN THEM. TOM'S PARTY MAINTAINED A RUNNING FIRE AND THE GERMANS, CAUGHT ON THE WRONG FOOT, LOST THE INITIATIVE.





BUT THE ADVANTAGE SO SWIFTLY GAINED WAS DRAMATICALLY UPSET BY A STRONG WIND THAT HAD SPRUNG UP. THE RAFTS WERE IRRESISTIBLY BLOWN DOWNSTREAM.



SEEING THAT THOSE ALREADY LANDED WERE NOT BEING REINFORCED, THE GERMANS BEGAN A SAVAGE COUNTER-ATTACK ...



BUT THEN A DASHING ACTION BY A PARTY OF FOUR ITALIANS CAUGHT TOM'S ATTENTION. WITH BULLETS SCREAMING ALL AROUND THEM, THEY CLIMBED THE ROCKS TO A POSITION FROM WHERE THEY COULD OPEN A TELLING FLANKING FIRE ON THE GERMANS.

THAT'S NIFTY  
WORK BY THE  
EYTIES!



STILL THE GERMANS CAME ON ... ONE PARTY WORKING THEIR WAY ROUND THE FLANK OF THE ITALIANS ...

HEY, TOM ... THOSE  
EYTIES HAVE BOUGHT  
IT, I RECKON. THEY  
WILL BE CUT  
OFF!

KEEP FIRING ... I'LL  
NIP DOWN AND  
GIVE THEM A  
HAND!



DUCKING THE GERMAN BULLETS WHICH RICOCHETTED WICKEDLY AROUND HIS HEAD, TOM WORKED TO A LOWER LEVEL AND ARRIVED IN TIME TO BREAK UP AN ENEMY RUSH ON THE ISOLATED ITALIANS.

AAAGH!

UH!



THE GERMANS DROPPED BACK, DRAGGING THEIR WOUNDED, WHILE TOM MADE A DASH FOR THE ITALIAN POSITION WHERE HE RECEIVED A GRATEFUL WELCOME.

THIS WAY, SIGNOR!

BRAVO! YOU SHOOT WELL!



THEN SUDDENLY THE BRITISH SERGEANT'S EYES RIVETED SHARPLY ON ONE OF THE ITALIANS.



TOM STARED ANGRILY AT THE BIG ITALIAN, HIS MIND GOING BACK TO NORTH AFRICA AND MERSA MATRUH ...



TOM'S FACE FROZE INTO HARD, UNYIELDING LINES. THIS WAS THE MAN RESPONSIBLE FOR HIS FIFTEEN WEARY, FRUSTRATING MONTHS IN A PRISON CAMP.

THE ITALIAN SEEMED ABOUT TO SPEAK, BUT A FRESH GERMAN ATTACK CLAIMED EVERYONE'S ATTENTION. THERE WAS NO TIME FOR EXPLANATIONS OR EXCUSES IN THE PRESS OF BATTLE ...





FIGHTING SIDE BY SIDE AS THEY REPELLED ONE GERMAN RUSH AFTER ANOTHER, A FEW CURT WORDS WERE AT LAST EXCHANGED BETWEEN THIS ODDLY UNITED PAIR.

MY NAME IS RUFFINI -- SERGEANT RUFFINI. IN SICILY MY REGIMENT SURRENDER TO THE BRITISH. NOW ITALY DECLARE WAR ON GERMANY. ITALIAN AND BRITISH SOLDIER -- WE FIGHT LIKE ONE. WE ARE A FLANKING PARTY TO THE MAIN ALLIED FORCE.



FLANKING PARTY! THEN WE'RE NOT AHEAD OF THE MAIN FORCE... THEY'RE STILL ADVANCING INTO THE AMBUSH!



ONCE MORE THE GERMANS MOVED RELENTLESSLY INTO THE ATTACK AND SUFFERED HEAVY LOSSES, BUT TWO MORE ITALIANS WERE HIT. THE SITUATION WAS DESPERATE.

WE *MUST* HOLD OUT TILL 'DARK, THEN WE MIGHT BE ABLE TO FIND A BETTER POSITION.



THEN, TOO, I WILL FETCH MORE AMMUNITION.

NIGHT BROUGHT LITTLE RESPITE. THE GERMANS HAD A STRANGLEHOLD ON THE TINY BRIDGEHEAD, THE YOUNG BRITISH OFFICER COMMANDING THE FLANKING PARTY HAD BEEN HIT AND HIS TWO N.C.O.'S WERE BADLY WOUNDED.

WE MUST HAVE MORE MEN -- BUT HOW ARE THEY TO CROSS?



AS THE NIGHT WORE ON, ONLY ISOLATED SHOTS DISTURBED THE SILENCE, BUT PUG MEYBURGH NEVER RELAXED HIS GUARD ON THE GERMAN REAR, SHARING THE WATCH WITH TRUFFI, WHO HAD HAD THE MISFORTUNE TO INJURE HIS ANKLE AMONGST THE ROCKS.

BAD LUCK RUNNING INTO THIS LOT, JUST AS WE WERE DOING SO GOOD. BAD LUCK FOR OLD TRUFFI, TOO.



MEANWHILE TOM AND THE ITALIANS, FINDING THEMSELVES PINNED WHERE THEY WERE, HAD NO OPTION BUT TO FACE THE NIGHT UNAIDED. THE RELATIONS BETWEEN THE TWO SERGEANTS, BRITISH AND ITALIAN, CONTINUED STRAINED.



WHILE THEY AWAITED THE DAWN, TOM RE-LIVED THE SLOW ANGUISH OF THE MONTHS IN THE PRISON CAMP. IT WAS A FREAKISH TWIST OF FATE THAT HAD NOW THROWN HIS DETESTED ENEMY AND HIMSELF INTO SUCH CLOSE COMPANY.

I WILL SAY THIS FOR HIM, HE'S A FIGHTER, THAT RUFFIN!



AT DAYBREAK, TOM STARED HOPEFULLY WITH THE OTHERS ACROSS THE RIVER.

THERE'S GOT TO BE A WAY OUT OF THIS! WITH EVERY HOUR, EVERY MINUTE, THE MAIN FORCE MUST BE NEARING THE AMBUSH!



SUDDENLY A SHATTERING FUSILLADE HERALDED A FRESH GERMAN ATTACK. THIS TIME THE ENEMY WERE THROWING EVERY MAN INTO THE ASSAULT, DETERMINED TO HURL THE STUBBORN BRIDGEHEAD BACK INTO THE RIVER.

ATTACK!



## The Price of Freedom

THEY WERE WITHIN YARDS OF SUCCESS WHEN PUG MEYBURGH LET OUT A YELL ...



VICTORY WAS SNATCHED FROM THE GERMANS' GRASP. UNNERVED BY THIS UNEXPECTED ONSLAUGHT, MANY TURNED AND FLED.





THOSE WHO STOOD THEIR GROUND WERE CUT DOWN IN THE DEVASTATING CROSS-FIRE.



NO PURSUIT WAS ATTEMPTED. INSTEAD, PICKETS WERE POSTED AND DEFENSIVE POSITIONS DUG. PUG, HAVING GOT TRUFFI ATTENDED TO, HURRIED OFF TO FIND HIS FRIEND.



PUG CLIMBED THE HILLSIDE, ROUNDED A ROCK, AND THEN HALTED AS IF SHOT.



## The Price of Freedom

FOR A SPLIT SECOND PUG STARED WITH UNBELIEVING SURPRISE. THEN, SUDDENLY, AS IF ALL THE PENT-UP HATE FOR THIS ITALIAN HAD BROKEN LOOSE, HE LEAPED FORWARD ...



SERGEANT RUFFINI FELL AS IF POLE-AXED AND IT NEEDED ALL TOM'S STRENGTH TO PREVENT THE FURIOUS PUG FROM ATTACKING THE PROSTRATE ITALIAN AGAIN.



LIKE TWO ANGRY BEARS, THEY GLARED AT EACH OTHER AND ONLY TOM'S HARSH WORDS STOPPED THEM FROM LEAPING AT EACH OTHER'S THROATS...



NOW JUST YOU LISTEN TO ME... THE PAIR OF YOU... YOU'RE FIGHTING ON THE SAME SIDE NOW -- SO CUT IT OUT! WHAT HAPPENED WAS LONG AGO, YOU'VE GOT TO FORGET IT. D'YOU HEAR, PUG?

TOM PULLED PUG AWAY AND SOUGHT OUT THE BRITISH OFFICER, CAPTAIN WILKES. THE YOUNG COMMANDER THANKED THEM FOR THEIR TIMELY SUPPORT AND LISTENED WITH ALERT CONCERN TO THEIR FEARS FOR THE MAIN COLUMN.

THIS IS DEADLY SERIOUS... CAN WE INTERCEPT AND WARN THE MAIN BODY BEFORE THEY FALL INTO THIS AMBUSH YOU SPEAK OF?



ONLY ONE MAN COULD GET US THERE IN TIME, SIR... AN ITALIAN GUIDE... CALLED TRUFFI. BUT HE'S SPRAINED HIS ANKLE.

DON'T WORRY... I'VE GOT THE VERY CHAP... SPECIALLY BROUGHT ALONG FOR HIS LOCAL KNOWLEDGE. HE'S AN ITALIAN... SERGEANT RUFFINI.

WHAT!



TOM CUT PUG SHORT, YET FELT HIS OWN PRIDE RISING REBELLIOUSLY. RUFFINI WAS THE LAST MAN HE WOULD HAVE ASKED TO HELP!

BUT LIKE IT OR NOT, THE SITUATION DEMANDED THAT TOM ACCEPT SERGEANT RUFFINI'S SERVICES. CAPTAIN WILKES EXPLAINED THE EMERGENCY TO HIS MEN ...

THE MAIN FORCE IS IN GRAVE DANGER BUT WE CAN'T AFFORD TO WAIT UNTIL OUR OTHER CHAPS FIND THEIR WAY OVER THE RIVER. WE'LL HAVE TO PUSH ON AS WE ARE. TIME IS EVERYTHING !



WITH A NOD FROM THE YOUNG CAPTAIN, TOM QUICKLY DETAILED THE NATURE OF THE ENEMY AMBUSH AND HIS HOPES OF SPOILING IT.

SERGEANT RUFFINI, HERE, SAYS THERE'S NO TIME TO INTERCEPT THE MAIN COLUMN BEFORE IT REACHES THIS AMBUSH. OUR ONLY HOPE, IT SEEMS, IS TO GET THERE FIRST AND THROW A SPANNER IN THE WORKS. SHOULD BE QUITE A PICNIC !

WHAT ARE WE WAITING FOR !

WELL -- LET'S GET CRACKING THEN !





## Chapter 5. **STRANGE ALLY**

THEY SET OFF IMMEDIATELY, LEAVING THE WOUNDED IN THE CARE OF A MEDICAL ORDERLY. BY MID-AFTERNOON THE SMALL FORCE WAS MAKING SWIFT PROGRESS OVER TRACKLESS RANGES WITH ONLY SERGEANT RUFFINI'S LOCAL KNOWLEDGE TO GUIDE THEM.



THE BIG ITALIAN SERGEANT SPOKE LITTLE, GIVING TOM NO INKLING OF HIS FEELINGS. IT WAS AS IF BY COMMON CONSENT THEIR PRIVATE WAR SHOULD FOR THE MOMENT BE SET ASIDE. SOMETHING BIGGER WAS AT STAKE



## The Price of Freedom

MEANWHILE, THE CAUSE OF THEIR CONCERN, THE MAIN COLUMN, WAS CLATTERING NORTHWARD WITH ALL SPEED. BUT DESPITE THE PACE OF THE ADVANCE, THE ENEMY STILL MANAGED TO MAINTAIN A TWENTY-FOUR HOUR LEAD.



FOR THE SMALL FORCE FOLLOWING RUFFINI ACROSS THE MOUNTAIN PEAK, THE FATEFUL RACE WAS ON. THE RIBBON-LIKE ROAD CLIMBING THROUGH THE VALLEY FAR BELOW WAS OBSCURED BY THE DUST RAISED BY THE SPEEDING MAIN COLUMN.



THE COLUMN SURGED ON, TACKLING THE FIRST GRADIENT ON THE LONG SNAKING CLIMB. HIDDEN AMONGST THE ROCKS, THE ENEMY STIFFENED IN GREEDY ANTICIPATION, THEIR FINGERS CURLING AROUND THE DYNAMITE PLUNGERS.



FOR ALL THEIR MUSCLE-CRACKING PACE, CAPTAIN WILKES' FORCE JUST FAILED TO PREVENT THE EXPLOSION OF THE FIRST DYNAMITE CHARGES. BUT THEIR BLOOD-CURDLING CHARGE DOWN THE BOULDER-STREWN SLOPE PARALYSED ANY FURTHER ENEMY DEMOLITION.



CHARGE!  
AT 'EM!  
LADS!

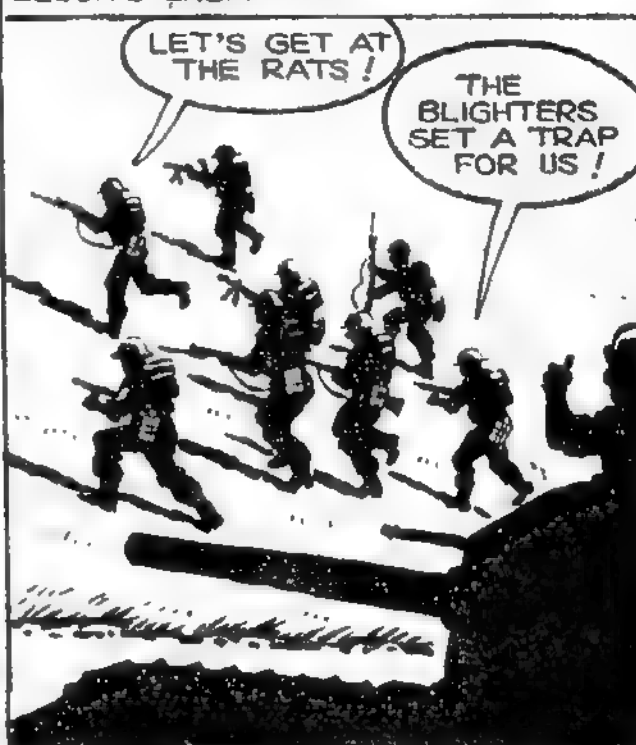
QUICK TO REALISE THE TRAP THAT HAD BEEN PREPARED FOR THEM, THE BRITISH ARMOUR OPENED FIRE ON THE AMBUSHING GERMANS AND CAUGHT BETWEEN TWO STREAMS OF FIRE, THE ENEMY BROKE COVER ...



FALL BACK TO THOSE ROCKS! **SCHNELL**—**SCHNELL**—**QUICKLY!**

THERE WAS NO PANIC IN THIS ENEMY MOVE, RATHER A GRIM RESOLVE TO SELL THEIR LIVES DEARLY IN THIS SUDDEN REVERSAL OF FORTUNE.

THE INFANTRY, COVERED BY THE ARMOUR OF THE MAIN COLUMN, SWARMED UP THE SLOPES WITH AUTOMATIC WEAPONS FIRING AND BAYONETS FIXED. HERE WAS THEIR ELUSIVE ENEMY...



LET'S GET AT THE RATS!

THE BLIGHTERS SET A TRAP FOR US!

AND FROM ABOVE, CAPTAIN WILKES' FORCE CARRIED THE FIGHT TO THE ENEMY'S REAR, MATCHING THE WAR CRIES OF THE MAIN COLUMN WITH THEIR OWN FEROCIOUS SHOUTS.



LOOK OUT, YOU SQUAREHEADS!

SMASH THE VERMIN!



NOW THEY WERE AT CLOSE QUARTERS AND A RIFLE, DESPERATELY WIELDED BY A CORNERED GERMAN, CRASHED AGAINST PUG'S HEAD. TOM SWUNG ROUND TO DEFEND HIM ...



A FRANTIC YELL FROM THE HALF DAZED NEW ZEALANDER SPUN TOM ROUND TO PARRY A FRESH MENACE. HE TRIPPED...



# The Price of Freedom

BUT A MUSCULAR ARM CLOSED ABOUT THE GERMAN'S THROAT, CUTTING SHORT THE CRY OF TRIUMPH ...



TOM CLIMBED SHAKILY TO HIS FEET AND LOOKED GRATEFULLY AT HIS OLD ENEMY, SERGEANT RUFFINI ...



AND SO, AMIDST THE HEAT OF BATTLE, THE THREE MEN REALISED THE FUTILITY OF THEIR QUARREL. PAST ENMITIES WERE FORGOTTEN -- NOW THEY WERE FIGHTING THE SAME WAR FOR FREEDOM FROM AGGRESSION.

MEANWHILE, THE DEMORALISED GERMANS WERE BEING ROUNDED UP AND THE CUNNINGLY-PLACED DYNAMITE CHARGES REMOVED. CAPTAIN WILKES AND HIS GALLANT LITTLE PARTY WERE GIVEN A BURST OF SPONTANEOUS CHEERS.



CAPTAIN WILKES TOLD HIS STORY, GENEROUSLY GIVING THE CREDIT TO TOM AND PUG WHO IN TURN WERE MADE TO RECOUNT THEIR ADVENTURES ...

BUT FOR SERGEANT RUFFINI, HERE, WE WOULDN'T BE ALIVE TO TELL YOU ALL THIS!

YEP -- WE'D HAVE BEEN AS STONE DEAD AS NEW ZEALAND PRIME MUTTON!

AND AT TOBRUK HE WOULD HAVE SNIPED YOU LIKE A COUPLE OF PIGEONS. WHAT A CRAZY WAR THIS IS!





CAPTAIN WILKES AND SERGEANT RUFFINI REMAINED WITH THEIR MEN TO AWAIT THEIR COMPANIES. AND AS TOM EXCHANGED A FAREWELL WITH SERGEANT RUFFINI, HE WAS CONSCIOUS THAT ALL THE OLD PRISON-CAMP BITTERNESS HAD VANISHED.



THE TWO EX-PRISONERS OF WAR JOINED THE COLUMN AS IT SWUNG ONCE MORE INTO THE ADVANCE, TO CONTINUE THE BUSINESS OF "SLOGGING UP ITALY"; DRIVING THE GERMANS BACK BEHIND THEIR OWN FRONTIER AND WINNING THE FINAL VICTORY.



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